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SUBJECT: OBAMA'S SPEECH IN CAIRO RECEIVES WARM WELCOME IN CHAD

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (U) The U.S. Embassy in Ndjamena held rebroadcasts June 9 and 10 of President Obama's June 4 Cairo speech. The rebroadcasts were in French and Arabic, respectively, in this barely-majority Muslim country. Reaction was almost uniformly positive, with participants stressing that they hoped to see the President's words turned soon into deeds. Local media coverage was also largely positive, drawing on citations from the President to call for action by Chadians locally. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Embassy Ndjamena held June 9 and 10 events rebroadcasting President Obama's June 4 Cairo speech to French- and Arabic-speaking audiences in this barely majority Muslim country, followed on both days by one-hour discussion and commentary sessions. Members of human rights and civil society organizations, government, diplomats, private institution reps, journalists and scholars attended the events.

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POSITIVE REACTION  
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¶3. (U) The President's speech was uniformly well received by our Chadian invitees, who expressed surprise at the President's depth of understanding of Islam. Participants told us that they believed the speech marked the beginning of a new era in U.S. foreign policy and that they approved of the President's comments on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially his tough stance on Israeli settlements. CDA pointed out that the two-state approach had long been part of our policy, whereas public criticism of settlements was somewhat newer. Our interlocutors also welcomed President Obama's balanced approach on "sensitive issues" such as women's rights, democracy and the question of Iranian nuclear energy. They responded positively to the President's acknowledgement of the role that economic problems are playing in undermining trust on the part of Muslims toward the West. All said they hoped that the President's positive, stirring words would result in strong, practical actions.

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SOME HEALTHY SKEPTICISM  
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¶4. (U) Participants also shared with us their critiques of the President's speech, wondering if it were overly ambitious. Some expressed concern that the President's plans could be held up by an uncooperative U.S. Congress. They emphasized that Muslims in general should not be held responsible for the actions of Osama Bin Laden, "a creation of the United States." Finally they found contradictory the President's advocacy of democracy, on the one hand, and the U.S.'s refusal to treat Hamas as a government. CDA pointed out that the U.S. position toward Hamas would change as the organization itself changed, including if it were to become the elected representative of a nation state.

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LOCAL MEDIA WEIGH IN  
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15. (U) Following President Obama's call to fight Islamic clichs, NDJAMENA BI-HEBDO, a private and opposition-leaning Chadian newspaper, wrote that Chadians should wage war against national clichs of Muslims and Christians, which had damaged local relations between the two groups. It noted that justice would prevail when tolerance and mutual respect became cherished values among Chadians.

16. (U) LE PROGRES, a pro-governmental daily, noted the difference between U.S. and French policy on headscarves in schools, stating that the U.S. wanted to protect individual rights while France wanted young girls to safeguard the division between church and state. The daily concluded that France's President should take a lesson from President Obama. The paper's headline quoted from the Obama speech: our faiths should unite us.

17. (U) NOTRE TEMPS, a private and opposition-leaning publication, published excerpts of key points from the President's speech on themes such as the difference between Muslims and extremists, the right of Palestinians to have their own state, freedom and human rights, and women's rights.

18. Radio Al-Koran Al-Karim, a private station belonging to the High Council for Islamic Affairs in Chad, rebroadcast the Cairo speech twice, followed by a two-and-a-half hour debate. Speakers praised the President's speech and expressed the hope that its aspirations would become reality. They also criticized what they perceived to be continued bias toward Israel on the part of the United States.

19. N'djamena Al-Djadida, the most widely-read Arabic-language news paper in the country, published excerpts from the speech and urged its readership to comment.

BREMNER